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**Marketing and sales of infant milks in the UK: 2015**

The MINTEL Baby food and drink report (MINTEL, April 2016) reported that sales of baby milk in the UK increased by £37million between 2014/2015 and 2015/2016. Danone increased sales by £39million whilst Nestlé (SMA) sales decreased by £5million. Danone have 82% of the market by sales and 79% by volume. Aptamil is the brand leader and earnt Danone £229million in 2015/16, accounting for 51% of all sales. Cow & Gate (also owned by Danone) had 31% of market share and SMA (Nestlé) 14%. The market share for other milks remains around 4%, with HiPP having 2% of the market.

Both Aptamil and Cow & Gate brands received substantial advertising support in 2015, which they use to support the brand across a range of products. The total above the line, online display and direct mail advertising expenditure on baby food and drink was £17.5million in the UK in 2015. Follow on milk has had the biggest boost in terms of marketing spend in recent years, increasing 39.5% between 2012-2015, with £16.4million spent on follow-on formula in 2015. Danone spent £5.7million advertising Aptamil follow-on milk and £3.7million on Cow & Gate follow on milk in 2015; SMA spent £3.4million advertising their follow-on milk. Companies spent about £21 for every baby born in the UK on marketing follow-on formula in 2015.

Advertising for Aptamil included TV support for its follow-on formula, emphasising how their products are ‘inspired by 30 years research on breastmilk’ and promoting its ‘Pronutra’ ingredients. Cow & Gate follow-on formula advertising using a more light hearted approach featuring the children’s song ‘Happy and You Know It’ but also references how it has been feeding babies for over 100 years and stating how ‘when happy on the inside, they’re happy on the outside.’

Factors influencing the purchase of infant milks was also considered, and the main factor determining parental choice of milk amongst their panel was ‘brand’. This is important as it is the support given to brands through advertising, through the promotion of milks to health professionals and using health professionals as part of the online marketing to health professionals and at conferences that promotes the brand integrity. The report highlights the importance of ‘brand loyalty’ in the market and parent’s being loath to swap brands that they think suit their child. Companies spend considerable funds on promoting brands to health professionals, and in supporting health professionals through invitations to conferences, study days, paying for travel and accommodation at conferences, lunches and trips abroad to help maintain professional loyalty to their brand as well. Other key factors that impact on purchasing choices includes price, age range featured on the pack, easy availability through supermarket and the perception that the product covers a babies nutritional needs. Less important but still highlighted as factors are convenient packaging, products being organic, containing specific ingredients such as prebiotics, offering health benefits or designed for babies with special requirements.

MINTEL suggest that the rise in the use of infant milks despite a drop in the birth rate in recent years is related to parents looking for products that provide a shortcut to conveniently providing key nutrients for their children, and therefore the use of health claims for products is likely to significantly influence this. Infant milk usage is highest in the most affluent households, with 60% of households with an income >£50k/year buying infant milks compared to 47-51% of less affluent households. This number is however still significant and suggests an increase in the use of milks into the second and third year of life. In this report it is suggested that 65% of children in the second year of life, 44% of 2 year olds and 43% of 3 years olds are still given infant milks. MINTEL put this increase of use of milks into toddlerhood down to strong advertising support for products.

This report reinforces the importance of advertising to companies to maintain their brand and market share and to promote new products and extend products as children age. The fact that brand is the most important factor for purchasers is seen as very positive in the commercial world, and highlights again the need to avoid the use of any materials produced by infant formula manufacturers by health care workers.

MINTEL *Baby food and drink*. UK- April 2016. Mintel Group Ltd.